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following the one in which the *liaison* begins. The inference must then be that at the time of her brother's death Gretchen is on the verge of motherhood, if not already a mother. This is thinkable, though for obvious reasons one would rather not think it. But now the *next* scene, with the tell-tale lines 3790-3, clearly refers to an earlier time and yet at this time Gretchen has on her conscience the death of both mother *and* brother. Else why the late insertion of the line

Auf deiner Schwelle wessen Blut?

What do we gain then, so far as rational chronology is concerned, by pressing any particular supposition concerning the Walpurgis-Night? We get a tweedledum in place of a tweedledee. The fact remains that as the text stands, and if language is not to be twisted out of its obvious import, the sequence of the scenes can not be fitted into a natural order of events.

And now, what of it? What attitude shall a critic of the poem assume with regard to that fact? Mr. Furst seems to think that he is coming to the rescue of Goethe's art in *Faust* by trying to prove it consistent with the laws of time and space. But since the poem as a whole is undeniably a dream-world in which the impossible is taken as a matter of course, why should we care very much whether a particular part of it is humanly possible or not? Let me close this letter with an imaginary conversation *à la Landor*, between Goethe and Eckermann:

"Heute bei Goethe zu Tische. Ich äusserte einige Bedenken in Betreff der Chronologie der Liebestragödie im *Faust*, indem ich ihn darauf aufmerksam machte, dass die Scene, welche Valentins Tod darstellt, offenbar am 29 April eintrete und demnach die hohe Schwangerschaft Gretchens voraussetzen müsse; wogegen die darauf folgende Domszene ganz bestimmt auf einen früheren Zustand deute und trotzdem eine Anspielung auf den Tod des Bruders enthalte. Wie haben Excellenz das eigentlich gemeint? fragte ich. Goethe antwortete, indem er mich mit grossen Augen anblickte: Wie kommt man auf solche wunderliche Gedanken? Mein Faust ist doch kein Beitrag zur Obstetrik. Genug; den Poeten bindet keine Zeit."

CALVIN THOMAS.

Columbia University.

### 'WALPURGISNACHT.'

TO THE EDITORS OF MOD. LANG. NOTES,

SIRS:—A reading of Professor Thomas's communication in this issue of MOD. LANG. NOTES has not caused me to alter my conclusion with regard to the chronology of the Walpurgisnacht in *Faust*, as expressed in the March number of the NOTES. The single objection brought forward by Professor Thomas is based upon an unwarranted inference, namely, "that at the time of her brother's death Gretchen is on the verge of motherhood, if not already a mother."

It has been suggested by Professor Bright that it may be possible to accept my conclusion (that the Walpurgisnacht to which Mephistopheles conducts Faust occurred in the year following that in which the love story of the drama took place) without supposing for the *übermorgen* of line 3662 any interpretation other than the literal one. He suggests that the *übermorgen* passage is to be understood literally as referring to the Walpurgisnacht of the first year, but that the action of the scene takes place upon the Walpurgisnacht of the second year, when Mephistopheles leads Faust to the Brocken festival, which has been dramatically anticipated by the *übermorgen* passage and the line (2590) in the Hexenküche.

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### AMERICAN DIALECTS.

TO THE EDITORS OF MOD. LANG. NOTES.

SIRS: At a recent meeting of the American Dialect Society a committee was appointed to supervise the reading of American books, for the purpose of collecting all words and uses of words not yet recorded in dictionaries. This is part of the larger work of the Society in gathering all dialectal material which represents spoken and written usage in America. Such material will be eventually incorporated, it is hoped, in a compendious American Dialect Dictionary, similar to the English Dialect Dictionary now in course of publication.

The reading of American books for this purpose has already begun, but the committee desires to secure more volunteers for this important undertaking. The books to be read